

## Breaking the Silence



*Alituha Dianah: A survivor of spousal torture, now an advocate for community change.*

Dianah Alituha, 36 and a resident of Kitamba village in Masindi District, had endured many hardships in her life. Her husband treated her cruelly, often subjecting her to physical abuse. Dianah was unaware of her rights as a woman, and whenever she sought help from her family, they turned a blind eye, leaving her feeling hopeless and alone.

*"Whenever we were in any meeting like our women's group, I kept silent. I had many problems at home. My husband used to hit me especially when I asked him to contribute to household groceries. I was terrified and for many years, I said nothing."*

Dianah's dire situation is representative of the stark reality faced by millions of women across diverse cultures. An alarming statistic estimates that 1 in 3 women in the world experiences physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

However, Dianah's story begun to change when she attended a civic engagement meeting organized by FOWODE. There, she learned about women and girls' rights and how one can seek help in cases of gender-based violence (SGBV). Dianah realised that women are capable of accomplishing anything that men can, and that the violence she had endured for so long was wrong and an abuse of her human rights. She however admits that it took time for this truth to be accepted. She eventually gathered the courage to report her husband's abuse to the authorities. With support from community members, Dianah went to the LC I chairperson, who assisted her in taking legal action against her husband.

*"The knowledge I acquired during the civic education meetings on referral pathways guided me on how to attain justice by reporting to authorities," said Alituha*

With FOWODE's intervention, Dianah's husband was arrested, legal assistance provided and justice attained. She was able to reclaim her share of their assets and eventually, the land they owned together was sold for 25 million shillings. This money gave her a fresh start and ignited her journey towards financial independence.

Dianah's story has been re-written and as of today, she has built a guest house providing her with a stable source of income to support her family. Enduring abuse in order to get her needs met is history. Being self-reliant has given her a push to become a strong and resilient advocate for change in her community.

FOWODE believes that justice begins where inequalities end. Civic engagement will therefore remain a critical antidote to addressing inequality while utilizing it to increase collective activism for women's rights, SGBV prevention and elimination.